

RHINELAND

A black and white photograph showing a U.S. Army tank, likely a M4 Sherman, in a wooded area. Numerous soldiers in M1 helmets and combat uniforms are positioned on top of the tank and around its base. Some soldiers are looking towards the camera, while others are engaged in various activities. The tank's tracks are visible, and the surrounding environment includes trees and foliage. The overall scene suggests a military operation or a training exercise.

The U.S. Army Campaigns
of World War II

Introduction

World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. However, the half century that now separates us from that conflict has exacted its toll on our collective knowledge. While World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as its veterans, a generation of Americans has grown to maturity largely unaware of the political, social, and military implications of a war that, more than any other, united us as a people with a common purpose.

Highly relevant today, World War II has much to teach us, not only about the profession of arms, but also about military preparedness, global strategy, and combined operations in the coalition war against fascism. During the next several years, the U.S. Army will participate in the nation's 50th anniversary commemoration of World War II. The commemoration will include the publication of various materials to help educate Americans about that war. The works produced will provide great opportunities to learn about and renew pride in an Army that fought so magnificently in what has been called "the mighty endeavor."

World War II was waged on land, on sea, and in the air over several diverse theaters of operation for approximately six years. The following essay is one of a series of campaign studies highlighting those struggles that, with their accompanying suggestions for further reading, are designed to introduce you to one of the Army's significant military feats from that war.

This brochure was prepared in the U.S. Army Center of Military History by Ted Ballard. I hope this absorbing account of that period will enhance your appreciation of American achievements during World War II.

GORDON R. SULLIVAN
General, United States Army
Chief of Staff

Rhineland

15 September 1944–21 March 1945

In September 1944, the long-awaited final victory over Nazi Germany seemed close at hand for the Allies. In the East, the Red Army moved inexorably towards the German frontier. In the skies over the Third Reich and the occupied countries, Allied air power wreaked havoc on the *Wehrmacht*, German industry, and lines of communication. In the West, three Allied army groups stretched from the North Sea to Switzerland—poised for the final assault against the Nazi homeland.

The mood in General Dwight D. Eisenhower's Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), was almost euphoric. General Eisenhower's intelligence officer predicted that victory in Europe was "within sight, almost within reach." The First Army chief of intelligence was even more optimistic, declaring that it was unlikely that organized German resistance would continue beyond 1 December 1944. Others, however, believed that the Germans remained unbeaten. Col. Oscar W. Koch, the Third Army intelligence officer, was convinced that the German Army, far from being routed, was playing for time and preparing for a "last-ditch struggle in the field at all costs."

Events soon proved Koch correct. Instead of a quick dash into the heart of Germany, what awaited General Eisenhower's armies was an exhausting campaign in horrid weather against a foe whose determination was steeled by the belief that he was fighting for the very survival of his homeland. As SHAEF plotted its next moves, 200,000 workers frantically labored to strengthen the German West Wall defenses, and the *Wehrmacht* prepared to contest the Allied advance in places like Arnhem, Aachen, the Huertgen Forest, Metz, and the foothills of the Vosges Mountains. The Rhineland Campaign was about to begin.

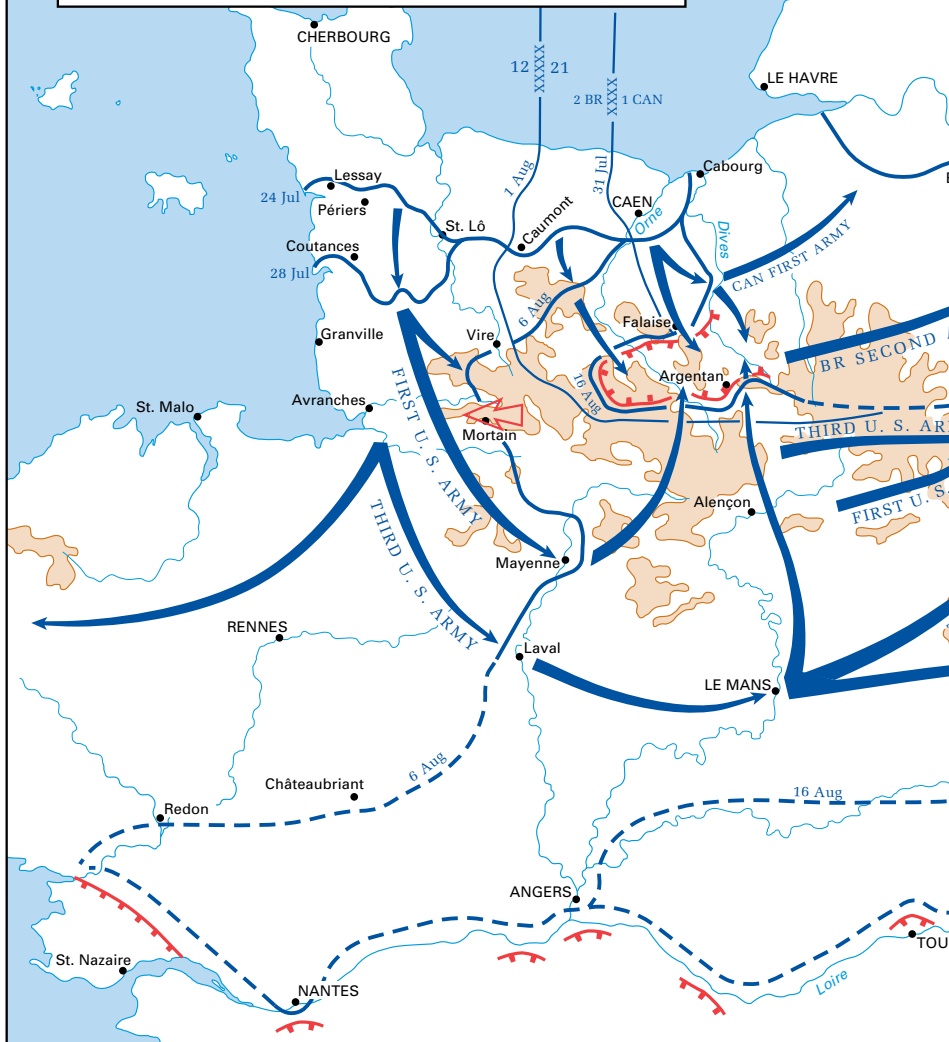
Strategic Setting

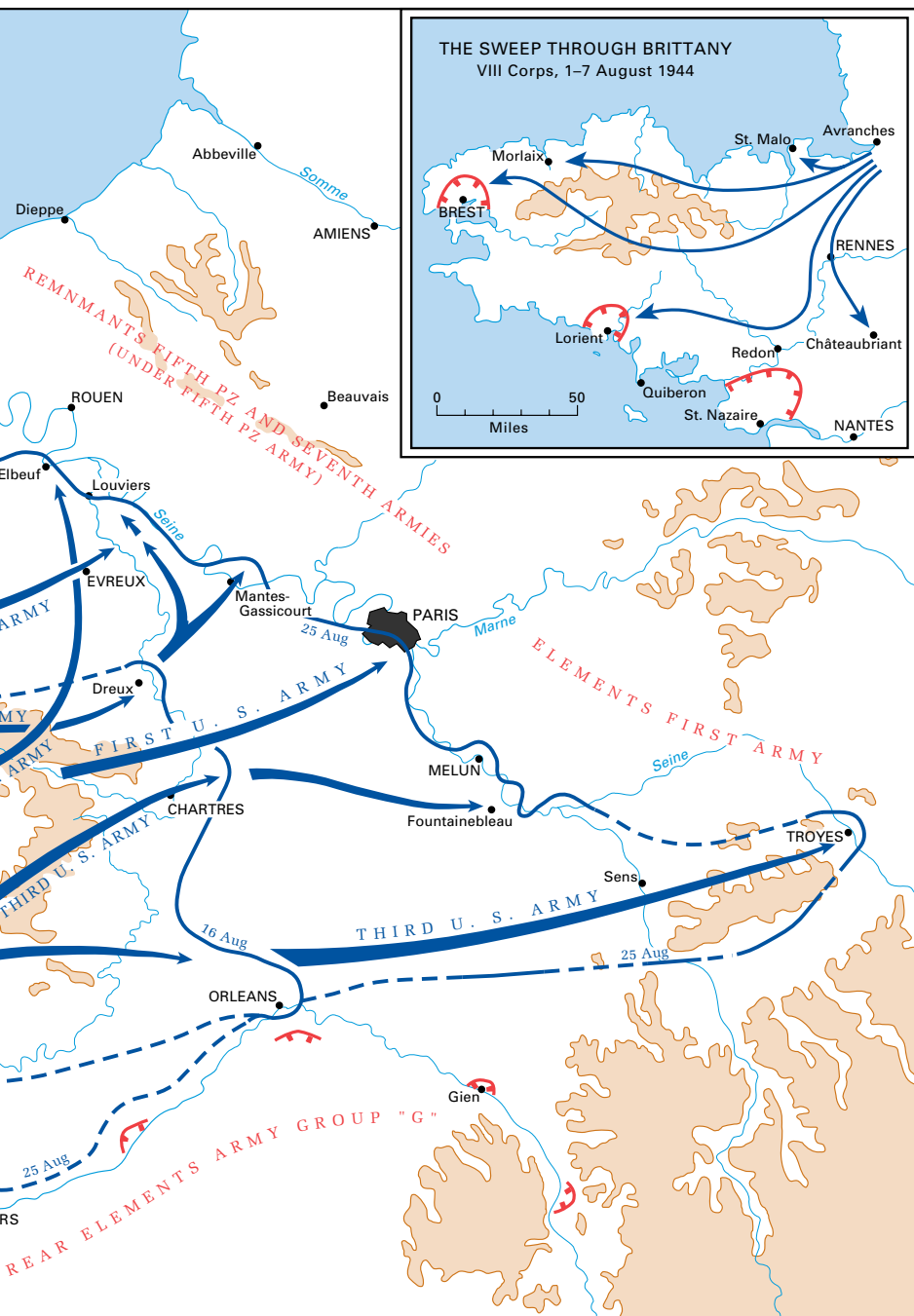
The Allied armies confronting the Germans in mid-September 1944 had arrived on the European continent through two great invasions—Operation OVERLORD and Operation DRAGOON. OVERLORD assaulted the Normandy coast of France between the towns of Caen and Ste. Mere-Eglise. DRAGOON occurred after a struggle with Winston Churchill, the British prime minister, and the British Chiefs

BREAKOUT AND ADVANCE TO THE SEINE 25 July–25 August 1944

- ← Axis of Allied Advance
- - - Front Line, Date
- ↖ German Counterattack, 7 Aug
- High ground, 200 meters and above

0 40
Miles





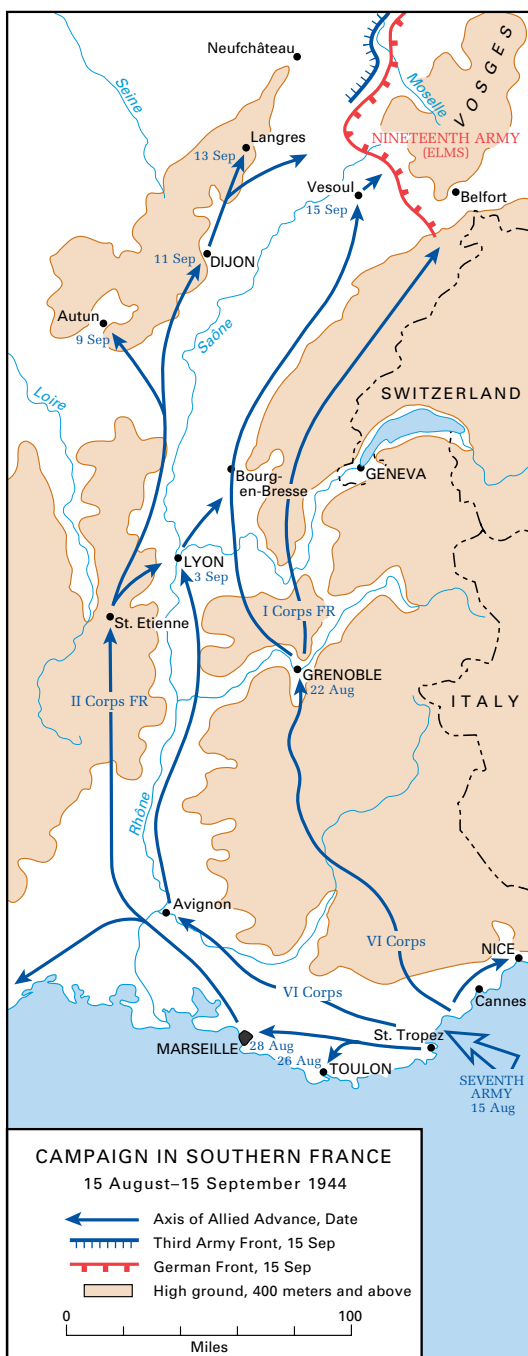
of Staff who had steadfastly opposed an invasion of southern France. To the end, Churchill saw the Italian theater as the key to unlocking the door to the Balkans and Central Europe—the “soft-underbelly” of Nazi Germany—while the Americans, to include Eisenhower, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff saw northern Italy only as a cul-de-sac. Scheduled for 15 August and promising to draw at least some German forces from northern France and seize the great French port of Marseille, the mounting of DRAGOON remained uncertain until the last moment.

After final approval came on 11 August, U.S. forces landed east of Toulon. Several days later, French units arrived. Both operated under the command of Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Patch’s Seventh U.S. Army. The success of the operation was phenomenal. Within two weeks the Allies had captured 57,000 prisoners and opened the major ports of Toulon and Marseille at a cost of less than 7,000 casualties.

As the DRAGOON forces dashed north up the Rhone River Valley toward Lyon, the Allies in Normandy raced eastward. On 1 September, SHAEF headquarters became operational on the Continent, with Eisenhower taking direct command of the Allied ground forces there. Montgomery’s 21 Army Group overran the V–1 rocket sites that had been bombarding England and then pushed into the Netherlands, while Patton’s Third Army and Hodges’ First Army, both part of the newly formed 12th Army Group under Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, kept pace. Patton’s forces sped through the Argentan-Laval-Chartres area, and Hodges’ army trapped a large enemy force in the Mons pocket before driving rapidly into Belgium. By mid-September, Eisenhower’s forces had reached the German frontier and occupied a line running from the Netherlands south along the German border to Trier and on to Metz.

Patch’s Seventh Army advanced nearly 400 miles up the Rhone River Valley in less than a month and linked up with the Third Army on 11 September, creating a solid wall of Allied forces stretching from Antwerp to the Swiss border. Four days later DRAGOON forces—heretofore under the control of British General Henry M. Wilson, the Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theater—were reorganized into the 6th Army Group, under the command of Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers. This, thereby, increased Eisenhower’s force to three army groups.

In the north, Montgomery’s 21 Army Group directed Lt. Gen. Henry D. G. Crerar’s Canadian First Army and General Miles C. Dempsey’s Second British Army. General Bradley’s 12th Army Group occupied the center and controlled the newly operational Ninth Army under Lt. Gen. William H. Simpson, Hodges’ First Army, and Patton’s



Third Army. In the south lay Devers' 6th Army Group, made up of Patch's Seventh Army and the General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny's First French Army. As Eisenhower had intended, the Allies faced the Germans along a broad front with a secure rear area for the vast logistical organization necessary for the final push into Germany.

For future operations, Eisenhower retained plans developed before OVERLORD. He resolved to make his main effort against the Nazi's vital Ruhr industrial region, with a secondary attack to the south of the Ardennes toward the Saar. He believed that this broad-front strategy would deny the enemy the opportunity to concentrate against a single axis of advance, while simultaneously affording opportunities to maneuver and shift the main weight of the Allied attack. This plan had its detractors, most notably Montgomery, although Bradley and Patton had their reservations as well.

Montgomery, Bradley, and Patton agreed that the enemy was in disarray and that the time was ripe to exploit his confusion with bold action. Montgomery argued for “one really powerful and full-blooded thrust toward Berlin,” by his army group, as a quick, sure way to end the war. To support his *coup de grace*, the British commander wanted Eisenhower to halt operations in the south and concentrate all available resources in the 21 Army Group. Bradley and Patton, equally anxious to make the main Allied effort, wanted to rush three corps across the Rhine near Wiesbaden, Mannheim, and Karlsruhe to force a rapid conclusion to the conflict. Eisenhower, in personal command of the forces on the European continent since 1 September, remained unconvinced that victory would be so simple. Worried that Germany still had substantial reserves, he believed that a single “pencil like thrust” into the German heartland would certainly be destroyed; instead, Eisenhower favored stretching the enemy everywhere. Enemy resistance, he pointed out, had clearly stiffened as the Allies approached the German frontier, and Allied logistical difficulties had become steadily more critical.

Although the Germans had taken nearly a million casualties on all fronts during the Allies’ summer offensives, the Third Reich still had millions of men in uniform. The *Wehrmacht* hastily organized nearly 230,000 of these soldiers into “fortress battalions” to defend the West Wall, a defensive barrier commonly called the Siegfried Line by the Allies, which extended from the Netherlands to Switzerland. Although Nazi propagandists touted the invincibility of these defenses to the German people, their construction had languished following the fall of France in 1940. Only with the setbacks in the West in the summer of 1944 had the Germans again begun work on the line. Still, if not impenetrable, the Siegfried Line was formidable. It consisted of hundreds of pillboxes with interlocking fields of fire, supported by an extensive system of command posts, observation posts, and troop shelters. Furthermore, the Germans had carefully integrated their man-made obstacles, such as “dragon’s teeth,” with the terrain. In early September, Hitler placed the venerable Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt in command of the German armies in the West and charged him with the defense of the West Wall. Hitler planned to stop the Allies at the Siegfried Line long enough for the *Wehrmacht* to regroup and mount a major counteroffensive.

Increasing enemy resistance was not Eisenhower’s only problem. Maintenance and support of his vast forces also gravely concerned him. The rapid advance had taken its toll on both men and materiel, while the absence of a major port in the north created severe short-

ages, particularly in fuel. Indeed, the drive toward Germany was clearly stalling for want of adequate logistical support. Most of the supplies and reinforcements for Eisenhower's forces were still coming ashore across the invasion beaches, a precarious situation given the vulnerability of these unsheltered facilities to bad weather in the English Channel. Although the excellent port of Antwerp had been captured virtually intact on 4 September, it remained unusable because the Germans still controlled the Schelde estuary, the sixty-mile-long waterway that linked Antwerp with the sea, and thus blocked access to the harbor. The Mediterranean French ports had also fallen into Allied hands, but would take time to rehabilitate, as would the entire French rail and road system. With fuel and ammunition running critically short, Allied offensive power was limited.

Increasingly, Eisenhower realized that the war in Europe simply could not be won in 1944. In a 14 September letter to General George C. Marshall, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, Eisenhower noted that although the unexpectedly rapid advances in northern France had caused him to opt for one all-out advance to the German border and possibly the Rhine River before pausing to regroup, he remained convinced that a "rush right on to Berlin" was impossible and "wishful thinking." He then laid out his general strategy for the future, a plan that he had given the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Montgomery, and Bradley in detail earlier.

Eisenhower directed that Montgomery, recently promoted to field marshal, take his 21 Army Group, along with part of the U.S. 12th Army Group and the First Allied Airborne Army, and push over the Rhine in the north. He charged the 12th Army Group with capturing Brest (in western France) and executing a limited attack to divert German forces southward until Montgomery had established his bridgehead over the Rhine. After the northern bridgehead was secured, the Third Army would advance through the Saar and establish its own crossing sites. Eisenhower also tasked Montgomery to clear the approaches to Antwerp, thereby opening that vital port for Allied use. After securing the bridgeheads across the Rhine, the Allies would seize the Ruhr and concentrate forces for the final drive into Germany.

The Combined Chiefs of Staff approved Eisenhower's plan. They also noted their preference for the northern advance to the Ruhr, over the southern route through the Saar, and echoed Eisenhower's views of the absolute necessity of opening Antwerp before the onset of inclement weather. Eisenhower's plan authorized Montgomery to make an attempt to force the Rhine and outflank the Siegfried Line. The objective, however, was clearly limited—to secure a bridgehead over

the Rhine to facilitate future offensives against the German heartland, rather than Montgomery's preferred "full-blooded thrust" to Berlin. The Allies dubbed this operation, the first in the Rhineland Campaign, MARKET-GARDEN.

Operations

Operation MARKET-GARDEN was, in reality, two plans combined. MARKET envisioned dropping three and a half divisions of Lt. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton's First Allied Airborne Army near the Dutch towns of Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem. The MARKET forces, under the command of Lt. Gen. F. A. M. Browning's 1st British Airborne Corps, consisted of the U.S. 101st and 82d Airborne Divisions and the 1st British Airborne Division, reinforced by the 1st Polish Parachute Brigade. The airborne soldiers would quickly seize the bridges over the canals and rivers between Eindhoven and Arnhem, thus opening a corridor for the ground, or GARDEN forces of the Second British Army. Lt. Gen. Brian G. Horrocks' 30 Corps would spearhead the ground exploitation, advancing from a bridgehead across the Meuse-Escout Canal south of Eindhoven to the IJsselmeer River, over ninety miles to the north, in two to four days. Second Army's 8 and 12 Corps would make supporting attacks on Horrocks' flanks. If all went according to plan, the Allies would have a bridgehead over the Rhine at Arnhem before the fleeing Germans could establish a coherent defense.

MARKET-GARDEN was truly a daring proposition, with success hinging on three critical assumptions. First, 21 Army Group planners believed that the German defenses in the Eindhoven-Arnhem corridor were thinly manned by disorganized formations of "low category" soldiers who would offer little resistance to the lightly armed airborne troops, much less to the rapid advance of the armored forces of 30 Corps. Second, the British presumed that the single narrow route suitable for armored vehicles could support the rapid advance of some 20,000 vehicles of the 30 Corps from their jumping-off point to Arnhem. Third, the plan banked on reinforcing and resupplying the airborne units by airdrops during a season when the weather in north-eastern Europe rarely afforded good flying conditions. Nevertheless, the stakes of gaining a foothold over the Rhine and outflanking the Siegfried Line seemed to justify the gamble.

On 17 September, the roaring of thousands of engines from the airplanes of the vast Allied aerial armada supporting Operation MARKET-GARDEN shattered the calm of the clear skies over the Netherlands. Nearly 1,000 heavy bombers attacked German flak posi-



82d Airborne Division drop near Grave in the Netherlands during Operation MARKET-GARDEN. (National Archives)

tions, while some 1,100 Allied fighters swept the skies searching for the *Luftwaffe*—all preparing the way for the 1,545 transport planes and 478 gliders of the largest airborne operation in history. In the early afternoon, over 20,000 airborne soldiers began landing on drop zones near Arnhem, Grave, and Veghel, while 30 Corps launched its attack toward Eindhoven.

Initially, all went according to plan. In the south the 101st, facing light opposition, quickly secured the bridges at Eindhoven and Veghel. Farther north, the 82d firmly established positions near Nijmegen. Problems did, however, begin to develop. The 1st British Airborne Division, having landed nearly eight miles from Arnhem, could take only the north end of the Arnhem bridge. Furthermore, German resistance began to stiffen rapidly. The Allies had severely miscalculated the German strength in the area. General Kurt Student's *First Parachute Army* held the general area of the southeastern Netherlands, and he quickly rushed several *Kampfgruppen* of the *II Parachute Corps* toward Nijmegen. An even graver German threat existed around Arnhem where, unbeknownst to the Allies, the *II SS Panzer Corps* was regrouping. Soon, the Germans began a coordinated defense under the direction of Field Marshal Walter Model, whose *Army Group B* also hap-

pened to have its headquarters near Arnhem. Additionally, the 30 Corps advance ran into heavier opposition than expected, making its progress up the narrow road to Arnhem, soon named "Hell's Highway" by Allied soldiers, disappointingly slow. Furthermore, increasingly inclement weather helped to thwart Allied plans. For five days, poor flying weather delayed the reinforcement of the airborne divisions and cut the effectiveness of aerial resupply efforts to 30 percent.

By 23 September, it was obvious to the Allies that MARKET-GARDEN had run its course. German forces had stopped the advance of 30 Corps just short of Arnhem at Driel. The 1st British Airborne Division, cutoff and suffering heavy casualties, received permission to withdraw. On the night of 25 September, some 2,000 British soldiers slipped across the lower Rhine River into the Allied lines and safety; the other 7,000 who had fought in and around Arnhem were dead or missing. The British would not return to Arnhem until the following April.

The American divisions had also suffered their share of casualties. The 82d had lost 1,432 killed and missing, and the 101st sustained 2,110 casualties. The fighting for the two U.S. airborne divisions did not, however, end with the halt of the drive toward Arnhem. The Allies, faced with continued German pressure against the MARKET-GARDEN salient, kept the two U.S. divisions in the line. Brig. Gen. James M. Gavin's 82d finally started withdrawing on 11 November, after incurring an additional 1,682 casualties; beginning on 25 November Maj. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor's 101st would follow, having suffered 1,912 more losses.

To General Eisenhower the ramifications of MARKET-GARDEN were abundantly clear. The failure to reach Arnhem dashed any hope of seizing a bridgehead over the Rhine and outflanking the Siegfried Line before the onset of winter. Additionally, the annihilation of the 1st British Airborne Division, coupled with the need to retain the 101st and 82d U.S. Airborne Divisions in the field, denied SHAEF the immediate option of further airborne drops along the Rhine. Finally, the failure of MARKET-GARDEN reinforced in Eisenhower's mind the wisdom of his broad-front strategy.

The Allied logistical situation was also a major factor in Eisenhower's future plans. To support Montgomery's offensive, the supreme commander had directed that it receive logistical priority. Indeed, Eisenhower had approved the immobilization of three U.S. Infantry divisions, newly arrived in Normandy, sending their trucks to support MARKET-GARDEN. As a result, the 12th Army Group had been fighting "with a halter around their necks in the way of supplies." For

Eisenhower, the inadequacy of the Allied support structure, caused mainly by the lack of suitable ports, now became the overriding operational consideration. The fact that Brest, captured by the VIII Corps of the Ninth Army on 18 September, was utterly destroyed and unusable only heightened his anxiety over opening Antwerp. Consequently, following the failure of the drive towards Arnhem, he ordered Montgomery to make the capture of Antwerp his first priority. Finally, the surprising speed and strength of the German response to MARKET-GARDEN showed that there were "no signs of collapse in morale or in the will to defend Germany." Clearly, the *Wehrmacht* was not defeated, and the Allies faced the prospect of more hard campaigning.

While Montgomery made the main effort in the north, Bradley and Devers did what they could with their limited logistical support. In the 12th Army Group sector, Hodges' First Army continued to move slowly toward the German border. Simpson's Ninth Army, after reducing Brest, moved into the line between the First and Third Armies. Patton's Third Army, although constrained by critical fuel shortages, conducted operations as best it could in Lorraine, while containing a major German counterattack in the Luneville-Nancy area from 18–29 September. In the south, Devers' 6th Army Group, with its own lines of communication from Marseille, continued its advance toward Mulhouse and Strasbourg through increasingly difficult terrain.

October 1944 marked the beginning of a bitter war of attrition that would characterize the fighting in Europe over the coming months. By mid-October, Montgomery had begun in earnest the task of clearing the Schelde estuary, giving the mission to the Canadian First Army. The Germans, fully realizing the importance of Antwerp to the Allies, began bombarding the city with V-1 and V-2 rockets. On the ground, the *Wehrmacht* fought tenaciously, particularly on the South Beveland Peninsula and Walcheren Island, holding out until 3 November. At the conclusion of the fight, the Allies had suffered nearly 13,000 casualties, while some 40,000 Germans became prisoners of war. Still, extensive mining of the approaches to Antwerp and attacks by German E-boats and submarines on Allied shipping prevented the port's use until 28 November, further inhibiting Allied efforts to improve their logistical situation.

To Montgomery's south, Bradley focused on taking Aachen and reducing the fortifications at Metz. On 29 September, the First Army began an offensive with the ultimate objective of taking Dueren and Cologne. Athwart the First Army axis lay the city of Aachen. Hodges, concerned that he had insufficient forces to drive to the Rhine while simultaneously containing the German garrison in



Aachen, ordered the seizure of the city. Aachen held great symbolic importance in the Nazi ideology. Birthplace of Charlemagne, it evoked memories of the glories of the Holy Roman Empire and had captured Hitler's imagination. "The city," the Fuehrer ordered, "must be held at all costs."

First Army plans for taking Aachen called for an encirclement of the city by Maj. Gen. Charles H. Corlett's XIX Corps and Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins' VII Corps. The XIX Corps attacked the West Wall north of the city on 2 October, leading with Maj. Gen. Leland S. Hobbs' 30th Division. To the south, Maj. Gen. Clarence R. Huebner's veteran 1st Infantry Division spearheaded the VII Corps assault on 8 October.

The 1st Division's 18th Infantry, under the command of Col. George A. Smith, Jr., had the mission of sweeping to the north of Aachen to link up with the 30th Division and close the trap around the city. In the 18th Infantry's way loomed Crucifix Hill, a pillbox-studded position key to the defense of Aachen. When Capt. Bobbie E. Brown's Company C attempted to take the hill, it was quickly pinned down by heavy enemy small arms and artillery fire. Realizing that only the destruction of the German pillboxes would stop the slaughter of his company, Brown grabbed a pole charge and rushed the German bunkers, successively destroying three pillboxes by shoving explosives into their firing slits. Although wounded, he then led his company in throwing back two determined enemy counterattacks, refusing evacuation until convinced that his company's position on the hill was secure. For his actions, Brown received the Medal of Honor.

On 10 October Aachen's garrison received an ultimatum to surrender unconditionally in twenty-four hours or face absolute destruction. The Germans, ordered to make a "last stand" by Hitler himself, refused. The assault on the city proper began on 11 October with an aerial bombardment by some 300 fighter bombers of the IX Tactical Air Command and a barrage by twelve artillery battalions. On 12 October, the 1st Division's 26th Infantry moved into the city and began the bitter "house to house and sewer to sewer" fighting that characterized the battle. By 16 October elements of the 30th Division's 119th Infantry and the 18th Infantry had encircled the city, but the remnants of the German garrison held out, surrendering only on 21 October. In the end, the German commander succumbed to the futility of further resistance, noting that, "When the Americans start using 155s as sniper weapons, it is time to give up." The First Army paid a heavy price for its operations from 2–21 October, sustaining nearly 10,000 casualties. Nevertheless, Hodges could now turn his full attention to the upcoming attack to the Rhine.

While the First Army struggled to capture Aachen, Patton's Third Army grappled with the problem of reducing the Metz fortification system. Both the city and its surrounding defenses blocked his path to the Saar and could not be bypassed. The key to "Fortress

Metz” was Fort Driant, a formidable bastion located atop a 360-meter-high hill on the west bank of the Moselle River. Observers in the fort could direct fire from artillery in the southern sector of the Metz area, while Driant’s own 100- and 150-mm. batteries, hidden in casemates with seven-foot-thick reinforced concrete walls, covered the approaches along the Moselle. Furthermore, the fort had an elaborate system of bunkers and observation posts, all connected by underground tunnels.

Fort Driant lay in Maj. Gen. Walton H. Walker’s XX Corps sector. Walker gave the mission of taking the fort to Maj. Gen. S. LeRoy Irwin’s 5th Infantry Division. On 27 September, Irwin launched the 2d Battalion of the 11th Infantry, supported by a company from the 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion, against the fort. The attack failed in the face of determined opposition. On 3 October, Irwin tried again, once more sending the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, against the fort. This time, the unit—reinforced by a rifle company from its regiment’s 1st Battalion, twelve medium tanks from the 735th Tank Battalion, and a company of combat engineers—breached the defenses of the fort, but with heavy losses. Irwin quickly began feeding in companies and battalions from the 2d and 10th Infantry regiments in an attempt to overwhelm the Germans.

The fighting within Driant now became a melee. In the maze of underground passageways that crisscrossed the fort, American and German soldiers fought what became known as “the battle of the tunnels.” By 9 October, the struggle had cost over 500 American casualties, yet the Germans still seemed capable of holding the fort. Finally, on 9 October, the Third Army ordered the attack halted and during the night of 12–13 October the last American soldiers slipped away.

After the failure at Fort Driant, the Third Army paused and marshaled its strength. Although the 90th Division had fought a tough battle to capture Maizieres-les-Metz, six miles north of Metz, the Third Army’s operations in the latter half of October centered mainly on “aggressive patrolling,” while absorbing supplies and replacements for future efforts.

October proved a difficult month as well for Devers’ 6th Army Group. Although Patch’s Seventh Army seized the high ground in the St. Die area, supply shortages and increasingly harsh weather conspired to slow the advance as Devers’ forces pushed deeper into the heavily wooded Vosges Mountains. Likewise, the First French Army had to abandon its advance toward Colmar and Belfort in the face of poor weather, limited supplies, and mountainous terrain that compartmentalized the battlefield.

Despite the worsening weather and the stiffening German resistance, Eisenhower resolved to maintain the attack throughout the winter of 1944. Writing after the war, he noted that “by continuing an unrelenting offensive we would, in spite of hardship and privation, gain additional advantages over the enemy. . . . We were convinced that this policy would result in shortening the war and therefore in the saving of thousands of Allied lives.”

The shape that the winter offensives would take was largely determined when Eisenhower conferred with Montgomery and Bradley in Brussels on 18 October to plan future Allied strategy. Orders issued on 28 October and 2 November conformed to Eisenhower’s broad-front strategy, with Allied forces closing up along the length of the Rhine and extending the enemy by hitting him at every possible point. The main effort would shift from the British 21 Army Group to the U.S. 12th Army Group until Montgomery opened Antwerp to shipping. In the north, clearing the Schelde estuary remained Montgomery’s focus. Then the 21 Army Group would attack east of Eindhoven towards the Ruhr to establish bridgeheads over the Rhine and the IJssel. In the center, Hodges’ First Army would make the main thrust for the 12th Army Group, with the mission of establishing a bridgehead across the Rhine south of Cologne. Simpson’s Ninth Army would protect the First Army’s left flank between Sittard and Aachen until the Roer was crossed and then swing northeastward toward Krefeld. Bradley, leery that Eisenhower might give in to Montgomery’s persistent requests for an American army to reinforce his Northern Group of Armies, had repositioned the Ninth between the First Army and the 21 Army Group on 22 October. In this way, Bradley sought to avoid the loss of the veteran First Army to Montgomery. On the First Army’s right flank, Patton’s Third Army would also support Hodges by advancing in a northeasterly direction. In the south, the 6th Army Group clearly had a subsidiary role. Devers’ forces would advance to the Rhine, secure crossing sites, and protect the 12th Army Group’s flank by denying the area of Luneville to the Germans. Once all three army groups had established bridgeheads over the Rhine, the main attack would shift back to Montgomery’s sector for the drive into Germany.

Collins’ VII Corps was scheduled to make the principal effort for the First Army attack on 5 November. There was, however, one nettlesome problem. The uncleared Huertgen Forest, potentially an area where the Germans could secretly assemble a counterattack force, threatened Collins’ right flank. Before launching his main attack, Hodges thus decided to secure the area from Monschau to Schmidt. Since the crossroads town of Schmidt dominated the Huertgen, seizing

that town was the linchpin to this plan. Hodges gave the task of capturing Schmidt to Maj. Gen. Leonard T. Gerow's V Corps. Gerow, in turn, passed the mission to Maj. Gen. Norman D. Cota's 28th Division.

The Huertgen Forest was a dense, primordial woods of tall fir trees, deep gorges, high ridges, and narrow trails: terrain ideally suited to the defense. The Germans had carefully augmented its natural obstacles with extensive minefields and carefully prepared positions because they realized something the Allies had not yet fully grasped—losing Schmidt exposed the Roer River dams to attack. So long as the Germans controlled the dams, they could flood the Roer River Valley, thereby destroying Allied tactical bridging and trapping any units that had crossed the river. These isolated forces could then be destroyed by German reserves. Consequently, the Germans were determined to hold Schmidt, knowing the almost impenetrable terrain of the Huertgen Forest would add depth to their defense and neutralize the American superiority in aircraft, tanks, and artillery.

The soldiers of the First Army were no strangers to the Huertgen Forest. In late September, the 60th Infantry of Maj. Gen. Louis A. Craig's 9th Infantry Division had tried to attack directly through the forest to capture the Huertgen-Kleinhau road network. The regiment withdrew after a brief, but bloody, encounter with the German defenders. From 6–16 October, the 9th Division again entered the Huertgen with Schmidt its objective. The division's two attacking regiments pushed some 3,000 yards into the forest at a cost of 4,500 casualties. As the soldiers of the 28th replaced those of the 9th Division on 26 October, they were struck by the fact that the men they relieved were "tired, unshaven, dirty, and nervous" and "bore the telltale signs of a tough fight." In addition to the rigors of the forest, the 28th Division would also have to contend with miserable late autumn weather. Although strongly reinforced with tanks, tank destroyers, engineers, and artillery, Cota shared the foreboding of his men. He later recalled that he believed the 28th Division had only "a gamblers chance" at success.

Rain, fog, and poor visibility postponed the attack from 31 October to 2 November. At 0800, artillery from V Corps, VII Corps, and the 28th Division shattered the morning calm with an hour-long preparation of over 11,000 rounds. At 0900, Lt. Col. Carl L. Peterson's 112th Infantry, the 28th's main effort, began its attack from Germeter to take Schmidt. But as soon as Peterson's lead companies crossed the line of departure, they began taking casualties from German artillery fire. The Germans had perfected the method of firing into the tops of the huge firs of the forest, hence combining deadly wood splinters

with the fragments of their artillery shells. Nevertheless, the regiment continued to advance, and by the evening of 3 November a battalion of the 112th controlled Schmidt. Although the progress of the 28th's other regiments was behind schedule, Cota and his staff were pleased, if somewhat surprised, with the unexpectedly easy capture of the town.

The German response to the capture of Schmidt came on the morning of 4 November. Following an artillery barrage, German tanks and infantry pushed the U.S. soldiers out of the town with some 200 American survivors joining the 112th's other defenses in nearby Kommerscheidt. The Germans continued to press their attack. The tanks and tank destroyers attached to the 28th Division were no match for the German Mark IV and V tanks, while the American infantrymen's bazooka rounds merely bounced off the thick German armor. First Lt. Turney W. Leonard, a platoon leader with Company C, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, won the Medal of Honor in the desperate defense at Kommerscheidt, which saw Leonard's armored vehicles destroy six enemy tanks and the lieutenant rally several infantry units whose leaders had become casualties. Nevertheless, on 7 November, the 112th abandoned Kommerscheidt.

The determined German attacks at Schmidt and Kommerscheidt marked only the first phase of their counterattack. Hodges had postponed the 5 November start of his offensive because of inclement weather. The delay allowed the Germans to commit three divisions, one a *panzer* unit, against Cota's 28th, since Allied activity elsewhere in the First or Ninth Army sectors remained negligible. The carnage in the Huertgen thus continued until 13 November, when Hodges finally came to the realization that the battered division could not secure the right flank of the VII Corps and replaced it six days later with the fresh 8th Infantry Division.

The 28th's attack had been one of the most costly actions by any U.S. division during World War II. Over 6,000 men were casualties. Materiel losses were also high; sixteen M10 tank destroyers, thirty-one Sherman tanks, and vast numbers of trucks, antitank guns, machine guns, mortars, individual weapons, and personal equipment littered the Huertgen. In the aftermath of the battle, many members of the 28th Division would sardonically rechristen their red keystone shoulder patch the "bloody bucket." After its relief, the 28th moved to what was thought to be a quiet sector to rest and refit. Tragically, the division's new positions, in the Ardennes, would place it squarely in the path of the German counteroffensive in the coming Battle of the Bulge.

Weather was a key factor in launching the 12th Army Group's main November offensive. Bradley had planned a huge aerial bom-



3d Armored Division tanks entrenched outside Breining, Germany. (National Archives)

bardment, dubbed Operation QUEEN, to precede the ground attack, but overcast skies caused several postponements. On 16 November, however, the skies finally cleared sufficiently and some 4,000 Allied airplanes, including more than 2,400 heavy bombers, dropped over 10,000 tons of bombs on German positions and towns. Unfortunately, the attacking First Army soldiers had been withdrawn some two miles from the German positions as a safety measure. By the time the American forces closed back on the German lines, the defenders had recovered from the shock of the bombing and fought stubbornly.

In the north the Ninth Army's progress, good during the first few days of the offensive, slowed in the face of stiff German resistance. It took the rest of November, and some 10,000 casualties, before Simpson closed to the Roer River in most of his sector. It was tougher in the First Army area. Hodges' main effort, the VII Corps, had to cross difficult terrain before it could reach the Roer. In the north lay the Eschweiler-Weisweiler industrial area, in the center the Hamich ridge, and in the south the killing ground of the Huertgen Forest. By 22 November, Collins had pushed past Eschweiler and Hamich but still had made little progress in the Huertgen.

Hodges was resolved to take the Huertgen Forest and throughout late November and early December threw units from the VII and V Corps into its bloody maw. The 1st Infantry Division, the 4th Infantry

Division, the 8th Infantry Division, the 47th Infantry of the 9th Infantry Division, the 2d Ranger Battalion, the 5th Armored Division's 46th Armored Infantry Battalion and Combat Command Reserve, and numerous supporting units all spent time in the hell that was the Huertgen. After months of fighting, the forest floor had taken on an aspect reminiscent of the ravaged "no-man's-land" of World War I. Wasted machines and shattered equipment were strewn throughout the forest and the stench, from bodies left in the open, was almost unbearable. The dead had to wait for some future graves registration teams to move them from the forest as the many wounded swamped the over-taxed evacuation system.

A few examples from Medal of Honor citations won in the Huertgen illustrate the desperate kind of heroism fighting in the forest inspired. First Lt. Bernard J. Ray, Company F, 8th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division, set out alone to blast a path through a German concertina entanglement that blocked his unit's advance. Ray stuffed blasting caps in his pockets, wrapped primer cord around his body, and grabbed several bangalore torpedoes. He made it to the wire but was severely wounded as he set his charges. Apparently, realizing his wounds would disable him before he could complete his task, Ray connected a bangalore to the caps in his pocket and the primer cord around his body and set off the explosion. Pfc. Francis X. McGraw, Company H, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, withstood a German artillery barrage and then halted the German ground assault with fire from his heavy machine gun. Running out of ammunition, he hurriedly replenished his stocks and continued firing until he had again exhausted his ammunition. Grabbing a carbine, McGraw continued to engage the advancing Germans until he was finally killed. S. Sgt. John W. Minick, Company I, 121st Infantry, 8th Infantry Division, single-handedly assaulted and neutralized an enemy machine gun. Continuing forward, he encountered a German company and again attacked, killing twenty Germans and capturing twenty more. Minick continued his one-man advance, knocking out another enemy machine gun position. Once more moving ahead of his unit, the young sergeant stepped on one of the many mines planted in the Huertgen and died.

On 13 December, the newly committed 83d Infantry and 5th Armored Divisions finally emerged from the Huertgen Forest near the towns of Gey and Strass. Although the eastern section of the forest and the town of Schmidt remained in German hands, First Army forces had finally closed on the west bank of the Roer.

Hodges had belatedly realized the implications of not holding the Roer River dams and refused to attack across the Roer until he could

neutralize their potential effects. Initially, the Allies tried to breach the dams by bombing, but they proved too strong. Hodges then decided to take them by ground attack and gave the mission to Gerow's V Corps.

Gerow planned an envelopment of the dams. Maj. Gen. Edwin P. Parker, Jr.'s newly arrived 78th Infantry Division would attack through the Monschau corridor and continue through the eastern edge of the Huertgen Forest. After seizing Schmidt, the division would attack the dams from the north. Maj. Gen. Walter M. Robertson's veteran 2d Infantry Division would attack northward into the Monschau Forest from the villages of Krinkelt and Rocherath, approaching the dams from the southeast. A regiment of the 99th Infantry Division would secure Robertson's right flank.

The attack began on 13 December but halted three days later when the Germans began their counteroffensive in the Ardennes. The Germans still controlled part of the Huertgen Forest, Schmidt, and the dams. It had been a rough month for the First Army; from 16 November to 15 December it had suffered some 21,500 casualties with few gains to show for its losses.

In the 12th Army Group's southern sector, the Third Army had renewed its assault against Metz on 8 November. Patton used Walker's XX Corps to encircle the city and its forts, while Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy's XII Corps attacked to the northeast to seize Faulquemont, the first objective in the drive to the German border. On 18 November the XX Corps completed the envelopment of Metz, with the city surrendering on 22 November. But not until 8 December did the troublesome Fort Driant finally capitulate, while the last stronghold in the Metz system, Fort Jeanne d'Arc, held out until 13 December. By 15 December, the Third Army had closed to the Siegfried Line and had seized several crossings over the Saar River. Patton then paused to build up the supplies and ammunition necessary to assault the West Wall.

In the far north, Montgomery's 21 Army Group had also found the going tough. Having finally cleared the Schelde Estuary, Montgomery pushed Dempsey's Second British Army toward the Maas River. Although enemy resistance was not heavy, mud and mines bogged down the advance. Nevertheless, by 22 November, the British had cleared the west bank of the Maas opposite Roermond. Mid-December found the 21 Army Group generally situated along the river, except for their foothold across the Waal River, north of Nijmegen.

In the extreme south, Devers' 6th Army Group made the most significant Allied gains of November. On 13 November the Seventh Army attacked through the Vosges Mountains. Patch's troops took Sarrebourg and the Saverne Gap on 20 November and, spearheaded by



Third Army tank destroyer in Metz. (National Archives)

General Jacques P. LeClerc's 2d French Armored Division, reached Strasbourg on 23 November. Within hours, the city was cleared with the Allied forces pushing north and south opposite the Rhine. By 27 November, after repulsing a German counterattack, the Seventh Army had secured a widening and dangerous salient into the German defensive line.

To Patch's south, de Lattre's First French Army attacked on 14 November to force the Belfort Gap and expel the Germans from Alsace. From 18–25 November, de Lattre's forces drove the Nazis before them, liberating Belfort, Altkirch, and Mulhouse and reaching the upper Rhine. Only in the High Vosges Mountains, just west of Colmar, did the Germans manage to hang on. Stiffening German resistance, however, stopped the continuing French offensive short of Colmar on 28 November, and de Lattre opted to consolidate his gains in the area of Belfort.

Opposite Devers, the German *Nineteenth Army* still controlled a large area west of the Rhine between Colmar and Mulhouse, which the Allies soon called the Colmar pocket. But Devers was not particularly worried by the last-ditch German defense of the High Vosges, believing it could be eventually eliminated. Instead, he and his generals focused on forcing the Rhine above Strasbourg—where the Seventh



Seventh Army artillerymen, November 1944. (National Archives)

Army had driven a deep, virtually undefended wedge between the *Nineteenth* and *First Armies*—and exploiting his army group's success. Eisenhower, however, was more concerned by the Colmar pocket than Devers. Furthermore, the supreme commander clearly believed that the Allied priority of effort still belonged in the north. Hence, he ordered Devers to abandon his plans to move across the Rhine and to reorient his force to attack north, well west of the river. By mid-December, the 6th Army Group thus occupied positions south of Bitche to Wissembourg and then on to the Rhine. From there south to Switzerland, Devers' forces were snugged up against the Rhine with the exception of the Colmar pocket.

The tough going of Allied operations from September–December clearly showed that the Germans had recovered from their defeats of the past summer. Nevertheless, Eisenhower determined to keep pressure on the enemy throughout the winter and deny the *Wehrmacht* the freedom to further strengthen its defenses. On 7 December Eisenhower met in Maastricht with Montgomery and Bradley to plan an all-out offensive for the early weeks of 1945. Eisenhower decided that the main effort would again shift to the 21 Army Group, with secondary attacks in the south. Montgomery was perplexed and argued that the past few months had shown that only one attack could be ade-

quately supported. He argued again for a concentrated thrust across the Rhine north of the Ruhr by his army group, while other Allied forces reverted to containing actions. Eisenhower disagreed and, having control of the ever increasing American resources critical to Montgomery's plan, made his views prevail.

Before the Allies could fully implement the decisions reached at Maastricht, the Germans attacked in the Ardennes. In the mist-shrouded early morning of 16 December, Hitler launched the *Fifth Panzer Army*, the *Sixth Panzer Army*, and the *Seventh Army* in a vain attempt to cross the Meuse River, seize Antwerp, and split the Allied front. Soldiers soon called it the Battle of the Bulge, after the salient the Germans made in the Allied lines. Although surprised, the Allies contained the German offensive, but only after much bitter fighting in freezing temperatures (the story of which is related in a companion campaign brochure).

As his offensive in the Ardennes ground to a halt, Hitler looked southward for victory. Just before midnight on 31 January, he launched Operation *NORDWIND*, sending the *First Army* south through Bitche and the Wissembourg Gap and the *Nineteenth Army* north out of the Colmar pocket against the 6th Army Group. The Allies contained this offensive as well. Once again, the fight took place in bitter winter weather where frostbite and trenchfoot were almost as dangerous as the opposing foe. *NORDWIND*, however, again demonstrated the tribulations faced by Eisenhower as the commander of a coalition force. As part of his response to the German offensives, Eisenhower had ordered a partial withdrawal of 6th Army Group soldiers. But his plan would have abandoned recently liberated Strasbourg and exposed the city to potential German retribution. General Charles de Gaulle, head of the French Provisional Government, found the desertion of Strasbourg unacceptable and appealed to Roosevelt and Churchill. Eisenhower relented, bowing to political necessity over military efficiency.

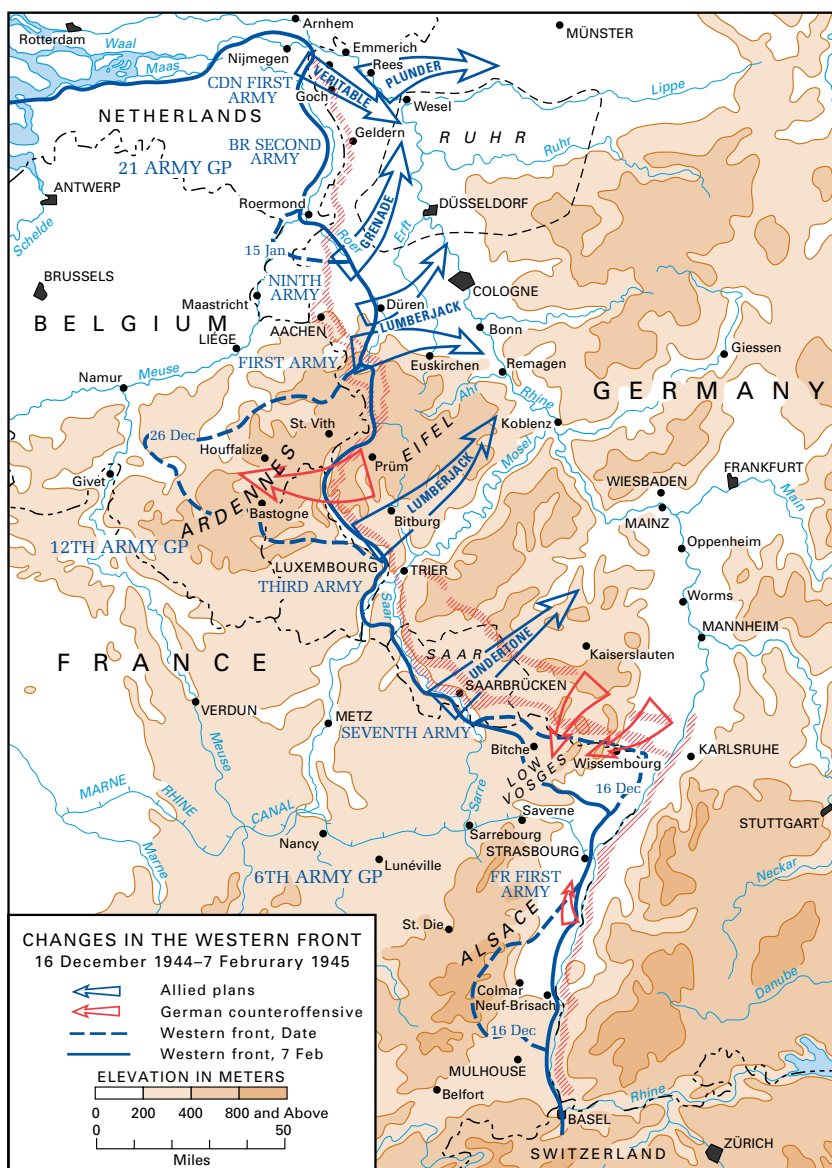
From 16 December–25 January, in the Ardennes-Alsace Campaign, the Allies fought to contain and then destroy the forces of Hitler's final offensives in the West. Eisenhower believed that the Germans had given the Allies a great opportunity by impulsively committing their reserves. Eisenhower wrote to the soldiers of the Allied Expeditionary Force that "by rushing from his fixed defenses the enemy has given us the chance to turn his great gamble into his worst defeat." But the heavy snowfalls and overcast skies that crippled Allied mobility on the ground and in the air, as well as the fanaticism of the well-equipped German attackers, gave the Allied soldiers little time to celebrate.

One of the critical problems facing Eisenhower on the eve of the Battle of the Bulge was a severe shortage of infantrymen. By 15 December, Bradley reported that his army group lacked 17,000 rifle-men because of casualties caused by prolonged combat and almost constant exposure to one of the most severe winters Europe had ever known. Although Eisenhower ordered the reclassification as infantrymen of as many support personnel as possible, the shortfall continued to grow. The Ardennes-Alsace Campaign only worsened matters, while the Selective Service System in the United States could not close the increasing manpower gap. As a result, Eisenhower made a momentous decision. Previously, most African-American soldiers in the European theater had been assigned to service units. Now these troops were permitted to volunteer for duty as combat infantrymen, with the understanding that after the necessary training, they would be committed to frontline service. Eventually, some 2,200 were organized into fifty-three platoons and assigned to all-white rifle companies in the two U.S. army groups. The exigencies of combat had temporarily forced the Army to discard its policy of segregating white and black soldiers.

As the Allies continued their campaign in the Ardennes and Alsace regions, they also reached consensus on a plan to drive into Germany. In January 1945, they had 71 divisions available and anticipated having 85 divisions by the spring: 61 U.S., 16 British, and 8 French. Eisenhower envisioned employing these forces in a three-phased operation. Initially, the Allies would destroy the remaining German forces west of the Rhine and close along the river throughout its length. In the second phase, they would seize bridge-heads over the Rhine between Emmerich and Wesel in the north and between Mainz and Karlsruhe in the south. In the final phase, the Allies would advance from the lower Rhine into the plains of northern Germany and from the Mainz-Karlsruhe area to Frankfurt and Kassel. In addition to capturing the Ruhr, Eisenhower's plan yielded the prize of the industrialized Saar basin and the major airfields around Frankfurt and Giessen.

The British remained displeased with a dual effort, which they felt would dissipate Montgomery's main attack in the north. Nevertheless, on 2 February, the Combined Chiefs of Staff approved SHAEF's plan, after being reassured by Eisenhower that the principal effort would remain in the north and that crossing the Rhine in the north was not contingent on clearing the entire area west of the river.

Early in the morning of 8 February, over 1,000 guns unleashed a barrage of more than 500,000 shells at Germans opposite Crerar's



Canadian First Army. Montgomery's Operation VERITABLE had begun. The plan called for Crerar to attack southeast from Nijmegen and the Reichswald Forest to destroy German forces west of the Rhine in the northern part of the 21 Army Group sector. Once again, Horrocks' 30 Corps, reassigned to Crerar, led the advance for the 21 Army Group.

By 9 February, the offensive had pushed into Cleves. Rain, floods, and tough German resistance slowed the attack, but by 23 February Crerar had moved past enemy positions near Goch. He then attacked toward the enemy defenses that extended from Geldern to Rees.

To Montgomery's south, Simpson's Ninth Army, under the operational control of the 21 Army Group, prepared to launch Operation GRENADE. Simpson's forces would drive northeastward to link up with the attacking Canadians on the Rhine. H-hour for GRENADE was set for 0530 on 10 February. There was, however, a problem; the troublesome Roer River dams had not been taken. Simpson was loath to cross the Roer until the dams were neutralized, and he therefore postponed his army's attack.

The V Corps, now under the command of Huebner—Gerow having left in January to command the newly organized Fifteenth Army oriented to occupation duty—drew the mission of taking the key Schwammenauel Dam. Parker's 78th Infantry Division was responsible for the main attack, while elements of the 82d Airborne Division and the 7th Armored Division made supporting efforts.

Jumping off early in the morning of 5 February, American soldiers attacked into the Huertgen Forest for the final time. The ruins of Schmidt and Kommerscheidt fell on 7 February, opening the way for the advance that finally secured the dam on 10 February. Although the Germans had not blown the dam as the Allies feared, they had destroyed its discharge valves. Instead of the anticipated massive flood, a steady flow of water gradually inundated the Roer Valley. Nevertheless, with the threat posed by the dams ended, the First Army had finally finished its protracted ordeal in the Huertgen Forest.

The flooding of the Roer delayed Simpson's attack until 23 February. At 0230 on that date the first assault forces slipped across the still flooded Roer, surprising the Germans. By the end of the day some twenty-eight battalions had crossed the river, firmly establishing a Ninth Army bridgehead. Simpson unleashed his armored forces on 27 February, and they rapidly advanced eastward toward Duesseldorf and northward toward Geldern and Wesel. On 3 March, Simpson's forces linked up with elements of the Canadian First Army at Geldern. By 5 March, the Ninth had driven fifty miles, uncovering the Rhine from Duesseldorf to Moers and killing or capturing some 36,000 Germans, all at a cost of less than 7,300 U.S. casualties. Together, Crerar and Simpson attacked the last German bastion west of the Rhine in their sector at the bridgehead at Wesel, forcing the enemy across the Rhine by the tenth. Unfortunately for the Allies, the



Searching for snipers in Pruem, Germany, February 1945.
(National Archives)

Germans succeeded in systematically destroying the bridges across the Rhine wherever they retreated.

South of Simpson, the 12th Army Group had been attacking since 18 January. Eisenhower, believing the Germans were off-balance in the aftermath of their failed Ardennes offensive, urged Bradley to attack with “all possible vigor” so long as he had a chance of achieving decisive results. By the end of January, the 12th Army Group had forced the Germans in its sector back to the West Wall, but the drive lost momentum. Although Bradley wanted to continue through the Eifel to the Rhine, Eisenhower halted the advance on 1 February in preparation for VERITABLE and GRENADE.

With the start of the main Allied effort in the north, Bradley’s army group clearly assumed a secondary role. In the First Army sector, aside from the mission of capturing the Roer River dams, elements of VII Corps advanced, protecting Simpson’s flank. The rest of the First Army went on the defensive.

In the Third Army area, Patton made limited advances in the Eifel region north of the Moselle River. By the end of February, his army had punched through the Siegfried Line from Pruem to a point below Saarburg, taking the Orscholz Switch, the Saar-Moselle triangle, and Trier.

To the far south, the 6th Army Group made the elimination of the Colmar pocket its priority. General Eisenhower had given Devers five U.S. divisions and 12,000 service troops from the SHAEF reserve to assist in this mission. While the Seventh Army held in the Saar Valley and made small advances in the region flooded by the Moder River, de Lattre's First French Army attacked the Colmar pocket. Ultimately, the XXI U.S. Corps attacked south toward Colmar and east to Neuf-Brisach, while the I French Corps drove north to Rouffach. By 9 February the Allies eliminated the worrisome pocket, driving the surviving Germans back across the Rhine.

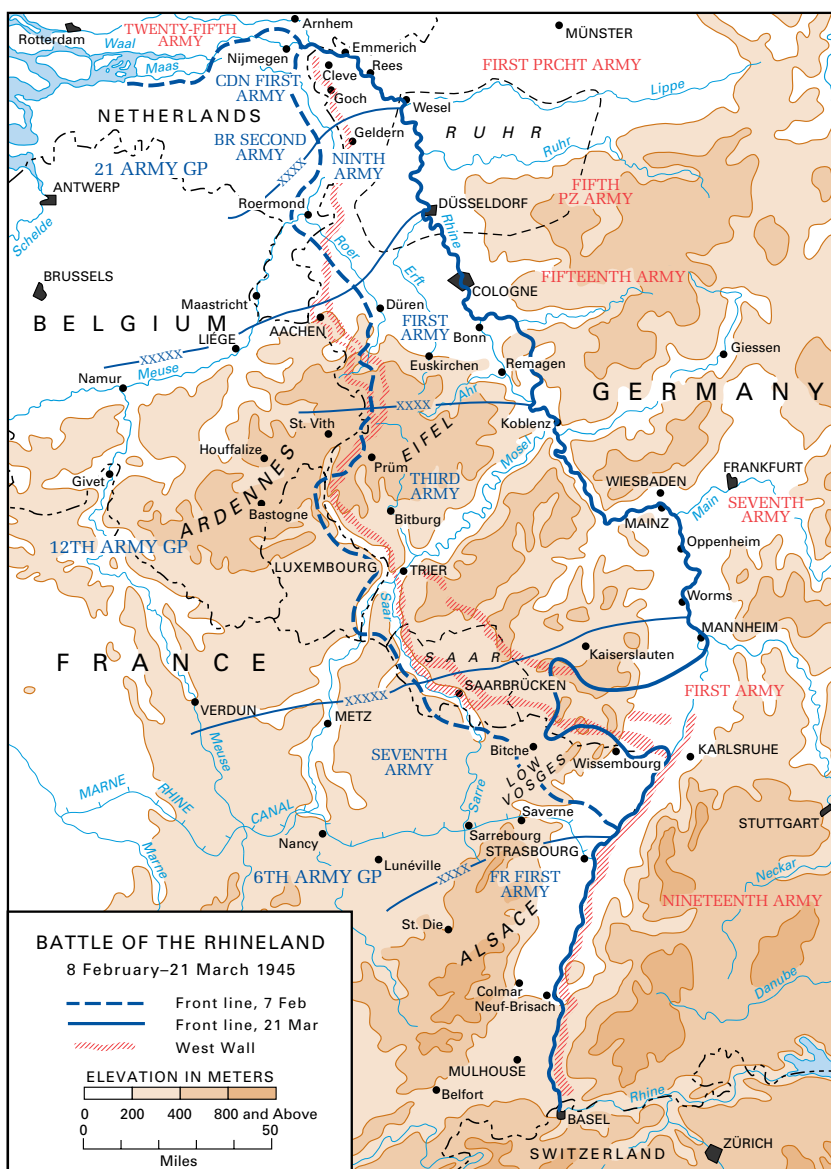
Devers, with the west side of the Rhine secure, gave Patch the go-ahead to make a limited drive. On 17 February the Seventh Army attacked, straightening its lines and, by the end of the month, had established a foothold south of Saarbruecken.

With the 21 Army Group firmly established along the Rhine, Bradley's 12th Army Group prepared to execute Operation LUMBERJACK. Bradley's plan called for the First Army to attack south-eastward toward the juncture of the Ahr and Rhine Rivers and then swing south to meet Patton, whose Third Army would simultaneously drive northeastward through the Eifel. If successful, LUMBERJACK would capture Cologne, secure the Koblenz sector, and bring the 12th Army Group to the Rhine in the entire area north of the Moselle River. The 12th Army Group also hoped to bag a large number of Germans.

Bradley launched LUMBERJACK on 1 March. In the north, the First Army rapidly exploited bridgeheads over the Erft River, entering Euskirchen on 4 March and Cologne on the fifth. Simultaneously, the Third Army swept through the Eifel to the Rhine.

In the First Army area, a task force of the 9th Armored Division, commanded by Lt. Col. Leonard Engeman, advanced toward Remagen as part of the LUMBERJACK offensive. As the armored task force reached the edge of the city, it discovered that the Ludendorff railroad bridge over the Rhine was, surprisingly, still standing. Engeman attacked and, although the German defenders attempted to destroy the span, took the bridge.

The Allies finally had a bridgehead on the Rhine. Over the coming days the Germans tried desperately to destroy the bridge, but to no avail. Eisenhower told Bradley to push five divisions across the Rhine



to secure the bridgehead, but he did not let the 12th Army Group take immediate advantage of the opportunity offered. Instead, on 13 March, Eisenhower ordered Bradley to limit the expansion of the Remagen bridgehead to a maximum width of twenty-five miles and a depth of ten miles, lest it detract from the main effort by the 21 Army Group.



The bridge over the Rhine at Remagen. (National Archives)

Although the Ludendorff bridge collapsed on 17 March, the Allies had built several pontoon bridges across the Rhine by then and had a strong bridgehead on the east shore. Hodges waited only for the word from SHAEF to attack.

Although Eisenhower continued to keep Bradley's 12th Army Group on a tight leash, he did modify his overall strategy in light of the rapid success of LUMBERJACK. At a 17 March meeting with Devers, Patch, and Patton, the supreme commander ordered changes to 6th Army Group's just initiated attack to advance to the Rhine in the Saar region—Operation UNDERTONE. The plan originally directed the Seventh Army to attack in the Saar, while de Lattre's First French Army defended on Patch's flank. Although Devers had initiated UNDERTONE on 15 March, Eisenhower proposed that Patton's Third Army attack across the northern portion of Patch's sector. This would allow the Seventh Army to focus more effort on the portions of the Siegfried Line in its zone. The plan would also create a pincer maneuver, with Patton attacking south and Patch moving north. When asked by Eisenhower if he had any objections to Patton's taking over part of his army's objectives, the affable Patch responded that the object was to destroy German forces, adding "We are all in the same army."

Patch and Patton worked out the details for the modified UNDERTONE on the run. The Third Army, though somewhat stretched, rapidly pushed toward Oppenheim, Worms, Mannheim, and Kaiserslautern. Patch's Army had difficulties as its units bumped up against the Siegfried Line. Nevertheless, on 19 March its forces captured Saarbruecken.

German pillboxes and heavy mining exacted their toll of Patch's and Patton's soldiers. Four examples of Army Medal of Honor citations won by Third and Seventh Army soldiers show the incredible bravery and self-sacrifice American soldiers once more exhibited in the face of the determined German defenses. Pfc. Silvestre S. Herrera, Company E, 142d Infantry, 36th Infantry Division, single-handedly rushed a strongpoint that had stopped his platoon's advance. He took the position and captured eight Germans. As Herrera's platoon resumed its advance it again came under fire. Once more Herrera rushed forward, this time through a minefield, to attack the enemy. He stepped on a mine, severing both of his feet. In spite of his severe wounds, he kept up his accurate rifle fire until his fellow soldiers could take the strongpoint. Two medics, Pvt. William D. McGee, 304th Infantry, 76th Division, and Pfc. Frederick C. Murphy, 259th Infantry, 65th Infantry Division, both died after they knowingly entered minefields to rescue wounded comrades. Capt. Jack L. Treadwell, commander of Company F, 180th Infantry, 45th Infantry Division, was leading his company against the Siegfried Line near Nieder-Wurzbach when it became pinned down by heavy enemy fire. Treadwell went forward alone, armed with his submachine gun and hand grenades. In a determined attack, he knocked out six pillboxes and captured eighteen prisoners. In the wake of Treadwell's one-man offensive, an inspired Company F swept through the remaining German positions and created a breach in the Siegfried Line that opened the way to its battalion's objective.

As German defenses crumbled, the Seventh Army gained momentum and broke through the West Wall defenses on 20 March and was beginning to overrun the Saar-Palatinate triangle. The next day, Seventh Army and Third Army units met. Their pincer movement had destroyed the German *Seventh Army*, and left the *First Army*, the only German force west of the Rhine, in desperate straits. Moreover, Patton reported that all three of his corps had reached the Rhine.

On 21 March a massive Allied ground force thus lay poised along the Rhine from Arnhem to Switzerland. Eisenhower's awesome armies, containing some 4.5 million personnel, included ninety divisions that anxiously awaited the final drive into the heart of the Nazi

Reich. The Rhineland Campaign had ended; the final campaign for Central Europe was about to begin.

Analysis

The Rhineland Campaign, although costly for the Allies, had clearly been ruinous for the Germans. The Germans suffered some 300,000 casualties and lost vast amounts of irreplaceable equipment. Hitler, having demanded the defense of all of the German homeland, enabled the Allies to destroy the *Wehrmacht* in the West between the Siegfried Line and the Rhine River. Now, the Third Reich lay virtually prostrate before Eisenhower's massed armies.

Eisenhower was gratified with the results of the Rhineland Campaign. They clearly justified his tenacious adherence to a broad-front strategy. In late March he wrote Marshall that his plans, which he had "believed in from the beginning and [had] carried out in the face of some opposition from within and without, [had] matured . . . splendidly." Yet all participants did not agree with the estimate.

Since the breakout from the Normandy beachhead, the most formidable opposition to Eisenhower's broad-front strategy consistently came from the British. Part of their resistance stemmed from Churchill's emphasis on approaching Germany through Italy and the Balkans and hence the reluctance to launch DRAGOON, a key aspect of Eisenhower's plans. After the breakout, the British, most notably Montgomery, pressed for a single, fully supported drive into Germany to end the war quickly. One reason for Montgomery's demand was the fact that by 1944 the costs of the war were bankrupting Great Britain; shortening the war would relieve the overwhelming economic drain. The United States was not experiencing such pressures, and Eisenhower chose a surer, albeit more cautious and time-consuming, approach.

But Eisenhower surely had other good reasons to avoid a risky drive into Germany. Until Antwerp began replenishing Allied stores in late November, logistics remained the supreme commander's principal consideration. Quite simply, he strongly believed that the plans put forward by Montgomery, Bradley, or Patton for a single, deep drive into Germany could not be supported logistically. In addition, as evidence mounted that the Germans had recovered from their panicked flight from the Seine River, Eisenhower worried that the enemy would concentrate and hit the exposed flank of any thrust along a single axis. The quick German response to MARKET-GARDEN and their offensives in the Ardennes and the Alsace substantiated Eisenhower's concerns

that the Germans were still an extremely dangerous enemy. Thus Eisenhower chose to press the German defenses continually, straining the enemy from Antwerp to Switzerland, and to increase Allied strength in men and materiel for the inevitable assault into the heart of the Reich. Consequently, he frequently changed the main Allied effort and executed secondary attacks when he saw opportunities across the broad front facing his armies. In many ways the Rhineland Campaign became a protracted, bloody battle of attrition, a battle the Allies had the resources to win. Nevertheless, for all the controversy over the single-thrust or the broad-front strategies, it is indisputable that the Rhineland Campaign ended in success, a triumph that paved the way for final Allied victory.

Eisenhower's tactful, yet determined, stewardship of a complex and often contentious coalition force made the successful conclusion of a difficult campaign possible. The indomitable soldiers fighting in the Allied cause, however, transformed the possibilities of high-level plans into victory on the ground. In incredibly harsh weather, over difficult terrain, and against a determined foe, Eisenhower's soldiers had triumphed. Of all these soldiers, the infantryman had had the hardest lot. In mid-December Eisenhower wrote to Ernie Pyle, the well-known war correspondent, that it was his foot soldiers who had demonstrated the "real heroism—which is the uncomplaining acceptance of unendurable conditions." At Aachen, at Metz, in the Huertgen Forest, in the Vosges Mountains, along the length of the Siegfried Line, and on to the Rhine River, the Allied infantryman had persevered and, through his determination, vanquished the *Wehrmacht*.

RHINELAND 1944–1945

Further Readings

Several of the volumes of the U.S. Army in World War II series are critical in examining the Rhineland Campaign. Forrest C. Pogue, *The Supreme Command* (1954), provides an excellent general overview of the campaign's operations and a thorough account of the coalition issues faced by General Eisenhower. Charles B. MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign* (1963), provides an in-depth look at the operations of the First Army from the West Wall to the Roer River, as well as an analysis of Operation MARKET-GARDEN. Charles B. MacDonald and Sidney T. Mathews, *Three Battles: Arnaville, Altuzzo, and Schmidt* (1952), contains a compelling examination of the ordeal of the 28th Infantry Division in the Huertgen Forest. Hugh M. Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign* (1950), recounts operations of the Third Army from September 1944 through mid-December 1944. Jeffrey J. Clarke and Robert Ross Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine* (1993), provides an insightful appraisal of the operations of the 6th Army Group from the invasion of southern France to mid-February 1945. Charles B. MacDonald, *The Last Offensive* (1973), examines Allied operations from early January 1945 through the end of the war in Europe. Russell Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign in France and Germany, 1944–45* (1981), is a superb narrative that comments on both operations and the personalities of the principal Allied commanders, while Alfred D. Chandler et al., eds., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The War Years: IV* (1970), provides insight into Eisenhower's private and public thoughts about the Rhineland Campaign, documents concerning operations, and useful editorial annotations that put the documents in context and refer the reader to other sources. Finally, Ralph Bennett, *ULTRA in the West: The Normandy Campaign of 1944–1945* (1979), analyzes the impact ULTRA intelligence had on Allied operations.

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Cover: *Infantrymen riding on an M4 tank-dozer through the Siegfried Line.* (National Archives)